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SUBJECT: SECOND SESSION OF DINK MURDER TRIAL

REF: ISTANBUL 0577

¶1. Summary. The second session of the Hrant Dink murder trial convened on October 1 behind closed doors and reportedly included, for the first time, the testimony and confession of primary murder suspect Ogun Samast. Meanwhile, during the run-up to the hearing, press focused on new information which added to suspicions that security officials were complicit in the January 19 assassination. The trial is scheduled to continue on February 11, 2008. End summary.

¶2. The Hrant Dink murder trial convened on October 1 for the first time since hearings began on July 2 at the 14th Penal Court in Istanbul's Besiktas district (reftel). According to press reports of statements made by attorneys following the closed door session, the primary murder suspect, 17-year old Ogun Samast admitted -- during his first testimony before the court -- to the January 19 murder of Hrant Dink. Samast, however, also reportedly claimed he carried out the murder under duress, accusing another suspect Yasin Hayal of coercing him by threatening his family. Samast also allegedly asserted he was forced to take ecstasy pills prior to the murder in order to give him the "courage" to carry it through.

¶3. Attorneys also reported that the Dink family -- represented in court by Hrant Dink's widow Rakel, daughter Delal and two brothers -- repeated a request to expand the murder investigation to include Istanbul Police Chief Celalettin Cerrah for failing to protect the prominent human rights advocate despite having evidence of threats against his life. The Istanbul Chief Prosecutor has yet to respond to the request, initially made at the July hearing. The court is also considering a separate Dink family request to incorporate into the hearings charges against police officers who posed with Samast in front of Turkish flags in controversial photographs taken shortly after the murder suspect was arrested.

¶4. During the immediate run-up to the second session, press widely reported on the content of a telephone conversation, leaked to the media on September 29, between a police officer and Erhan Tuncel who has been charged with inciting Dink's murder. A transcript of the conversation, which took place immediately after the January 19 assassination, suggests the police officer was, at the very least, aware of a plot against Dink's life, if not involved in a plot himself. The trial is scheduled to re-convene on February 11, 2008.

¶5. Comment. The Dink murder trial is expected to continue for some time along with the associated extended recesses as officials move forward with their investigations. The significance of this murder -- and allegations that not just ultranationalists, but police in some way were complicit

with, or applauded the assassination of this high profile
Turkish-Armenian human rights activist -- will not diminish
with time. End comment.

WIENER